

# Roles in Interaction and Backchanneling Behavior: some differences between two casual interviews

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## Abstract

To examine the interaction in conversation, Tanaka (2001) proposed three categories: 'societal roles', 'interpersonal roles' and 'activity roles'. In Tanaka (2011), she applied this categorization to analyze two casual interviews: a daughter interviewed her mother and her father. To examine how their roles affected their linguistic choices, she focused on Japanese sentence-ending particles. The results showed how their role differences were reflected in their use of sentence-ending particles.

Using the same interviews, this paper has a different focus: the interactants' backchanneling behavior. At the first step of analyzing their linguistic behavior, IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys was used. The software was originally developed to analyze the responses to open-ended questionnaires and is mainly used to extract 'content words' from data. In this paper, however, I will try to employ this for conversation analysis, especially to extract backchannels which play some important functions in interaction. I will explore some possible uses of this software to consider the relationship between their roles and their linguistic behavior.

## 対話における役割とあいづち行動について —2つの略式インタビューに見られる違いから—

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## 要旨

筆者は、Tanaka (2001) において、会話でのやりとりを分析する際に考察する必要があると考えられる3つの役割として「社会役割」「対人関係役割」「活動役割」を提案した。Tanaka (2011) では、このカテゴリーを2つの略式インタビュー（母と娘、父と娘）の分析に適用した。かれらのさまざまな役割がどのように言語選択に影響を与えるかを調べるため、そこでは日本語の終助詞の使用に焦点を当てた。

本稿では、同じ略式インタビューを用い、参加者のあいづち行動に焦点を当てる。かれらの言語行動を調査するため、コンピューター・ソフト IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys を利用する。このソフトは本来、自由回答形式のアンケート結果を分析するために開発されたものであり、主にデータ中の「内容語」を抽出するために用いられるが、それを会話分析に応用し、敢えて会話中で機能的な働きをする「あいづち」の抽出への利用を試みる。参加者の役割と言語行動との関係を考察するためにこのソフトがどのように使えるか、その可能性を探りたいと考えている。

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Tanaka (2001), I proposed three categories to examine interaction: ‘societal roles’, ‘interpersonal roles’<sup>1</sup> and ‘activity roles’. Employing this categorization, I have examined different types of interaction from various points of view (See Tanaka 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). In my previous study (Tanaka 2011), I applied these categories to two casual interviews (a daughter interviews her mother and her father), and examined how their roles in interaction affected their use of sentence-ending particles. Though the results showed their roles certainly affected their choice of the particles, they were simply based on one aspect of their linguistic behavior, and different aspects should also be examined. In this study, I will focus on their backchanneling behavior in the same data, and explore how their roles are reflected.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1 Data

The data for analysis (Data 1 and Data 2) are shown in the following chart. They are talks between a father and his daughter, and a mother and her daughter. Their talks can be categorized into ‘open-ended interviews’ (See Silverman 2006: 110). In their talks, the daughter, the interviewer, actively employed the skills for open-ended interviews: flexibility, rapport with the interviewee, and active listening. With the interviewee’s permission, the interviews were recorded and all their interactions were transcribed for analysis.

**Chart 1. Data 1 and Data 2**

	Data 1		Data 2	
Type of interaction	Open-ended interview		Open-ended interview	
Date of Recording	3 November, 2001		26 March, 2010	
Time length	41 minutes 16 seconds		43 minutes 17 seconds	
Participants	Father (F)	82 years old	Mother (M)	79 years old
	Daughter (D)	47 years old	Daughter (D)	56 years old

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<sup>1</sup> In Tanaka (2001), I called it ‘personal relationship role’, but following Thomas (2001), I changed the term to ‘interpersonal role’.

## 2.2 Roles of the Participants

To analyze the data above, I will apply the categorization of roles I developed in Tanaka (2001): each role is explained in 2.2.1–2.2.3 below. Some possible roles of F-D and M-D are shown in the following chart<sup>2</sup>. Roles are varied and changeable as the interaction proceeds, and the roles shown here are not exhaustive but simply represent some possibilities.

**Chart 2. Roles of the Participants: F-D and M-D interaction**

	SOCIAL ROLE					
	SOCIETAL ROLE		INTERPERSONAL ROLE		ACTIVITY ROLE	
	Role Focus	Main Role	Role Focus	Main Role	Main Role	Speech Act Role
F	elderly	Pensioner Man <sup>3</sup>	elderly	father- <sup>4</sup> man-	Interviewee	answer giver
D	middle-aged	Teacher Woman	working	-daughter-woman	Interviewer	question asker
M	elderly	Homemaker Woman	elderly	mother-woman-	Interviewee	answer giver
D	middle-aged	Teacher Woman	working	-daughter-woman	Interviewer	question asker

### 2.2.1 Societal role

*Societal role* is defined as ‘a role which the individual occupies in society, regardless of the relationship with another interactant in the current interaction’ (Tanaka 2001: 70). For example, if a person is a teacher by occupation, s/he may be regarded as a ‘teacher’ by another interactant, even when the interactant is not her/his student.

Applying the category to my data, their societal roles of Data 1 are, for example, Pensioner and Teacher. Man and Woman can be another possible role of each interactant. In some contexts, one aspect of the role may be highlighted, such as an ‘elderly’ Man or a ‘middle-aged’ Woman. On the other hand, the societal roles of Data 2 are, for example, Homemaker and Teacher. Woman can be another possible role in society, and one aspect of the role may be focused in some contexts: e.g. an ‘elderly’ Woman or a ‘middle-aged’ Woman.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the findings in Tanaka (2011), I revised the roles shown in Tanaka (2011: 145).

<sup>3</sup> Using the upper case (Man) and the lower case (man), I differentiate the societal role from the interpersonal role.

<sup>4</sup> Hyphens (-) here indicate the interpersonal relations: e.g. father-daughter, man-woman.

### 2.2.2 Interpersonal role

*Interpersonal role* is defined as ‘the personal relationship obtaining between one interactant and another’ (Tanaka 2001: 71). Unlike *societal role*, *interpersonal role* is based on the actual relationship between the interactants: e.g. teacher–student.

In Data 1, one of their interpersonal roles is ‘father and daughter’, while they are ‘mother and daughter’ in Data 2. In some contexts, one aspect of the role can be focused on and their interpersonal roles can be, for example, ‘*working* daughter and her mother’ (See Tanaka 2005: 129) or ‘an *elderly* mother and her daughter’ (ibid.: 130). Other relationships can also emerge, such as ‘man-woman’ or ‘woman-woman’.

### 2.2.3 Activity role

*Activity role* is defined as ‘the relationship obtaining between one interactant and another in that particular *activity type* (See Levinson 1979) where the interaction occurs’ (Tanaka 2001: 73–76). For example, a teacher plays the activity role of ‘teacher’ in class, which affects her/his linguistic behavior.

The activity type of my data is regarded as an open-ended casual interview. In this activity type, participants mainly play the activity roles of ‘interviewer’ and ‘interviewee’, and the interviewer (D) mainly plays the role of ‘question asker’, and the interviewee (F and M) plays the role of ‘answer giver’ (for the details, see Tanaka 2005).

## 2.3 Method

Considering the roles discussed above, I investigated how their roles affect the participants’ linguistic behavior. In this paper, I will focus on their backchanneling behavior, and investigate whether their roles are reflected in it.

First of all, to obtain the overall picture of their lexical choice, I will use Text Analytics for Surveys<sup>5</sup>, computer software which was mainly designed to work with the data from quantitative surveys containing open questions. As this software was basically developed for the analysis of relatively shorter text in questionnaire responses, it may not properly applicable for the analysis of longer text such as transcribed interviews (Dazai 2010: 60). However, I would like to probe a possible use of this software through this study. I would be happy if the process of my trial and error might give some hints for text analysis to the researchers in this field.

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<sup>5</sup> It was released as SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys in 2008, and the product name has been changed into IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys.

### 2.3.1 Procedure

To use Text Analytics for Surveys for the analysis of my data, I followed the procedure below:

- (1) The sound data was transcribed<sup>6</sup> and written in Excel files.

Dazai (2010: 60) proposes to divide the text into each sentence which can be marked by the Japanese punctuation period (ku-ten: 「。」), but I did not use the punctuation period in my transcript and made each turn a basic unit, which was written in one line.

- (2) An ID number (1, 2, 3....) was given to each turn.

- (3) Next to the ID number, an interpersonal role marker (F, M, or D) was given to indicate the speaker. Odd ID numbers were given to the interviewee (F and M), and even ID numbers to the interviewer (D). An example is shown below:

ID	関係 (interpersonal role)	発話 (utterance)
1	F:	昨日、書い [たような] [こと] だよ
2	D:	[そうそう昨日] [笑い] そした [ら]

- (4) The Excel data was input into Text Analytics for Surveys: 「インポート」 (import).

- (5) Lexical items were extracted in the order of frequency : 「抽出」 (extraction).

It should be noted, however, that this software counts items as ‘one’ even when an item is used more than twice in one turn. (As this software was developed mainly to analyze the responses to open-ended questionnaires, when the same word repeatedly appears on the same ID, it is regarded as one opinion from the same person.) The actual frequency was manually counted later: See (12) below.

- (6) From Data 1 (F-D), the lexical items which appeared more than 20 times were *categorized*: 「カテゴリ」→「カテゴリを作成」→「出現頻度に基づく」(20回以上の各要素に作成).

As a result, 10 items were chosen: 「うん」(210) 「あー」(46) 「もう」(30) 「うーん」(28) 「父」(28) 「そう」(27) 「いる」(26) 「戦争」(21) 「ああ」(20) 「ふーん」(20).

- (7) From Data 2 (M-D), the lexical items which appeared more than 60 times were *categorized*. As a result, 10 items were chosen: 「うん」(506) 「何か (なにか・なんか)」(132) 「ある」(101) 「そう」(97) 「うーん」(67) 「する」(65) 「ふーん」(65) 「ない」(64) 「人」(64) 「言う」(60)

- (8) From (6) above, focusing on *interactional words*<sup>7</sup> in conversation, I chose 「うん」 「あー」

<sup>6</sup> The transcription conventions are shown at the end of this paper.

「もう」「うーん」「そう」「ああ」「ふーん」 for analysis. 「あー」 and 「ああ」 were categorized as one : 「あー・ああ」.

(9) From (7), focusing on *interactional words* in conversation, 「うん」「何か」「そう」「うーん」「ふーん」 were chosen.

(10) Referring to the actual text, I excluded the uses which obviously could not be classified into the same category. For example, 「あー」 below was first categorized into 「あー・ああ」, but in this context it is just a part of 「あした」 which means ‘tomorrow’.

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485 F: まあ、そこに出られる人は、あーした楽しみで来んだろう、  
maa, soko ni derareru hito wa, aashita tanoshimi de kundaroo,  
(Well, the people who can join them will come for pleasure tomorrow.)

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In the same way, although 「ふーん」 below was categorized into 「うーん」 first, it should be more appropriately classified into 「ふーん」.

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676 D: ふーん、  
huuun,  
(I see.)

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(11) The frequency of each item was counted; as explained above, items were counted as ‘one’ even when the same item appeared more than twice in the same turn. The results are shown in Chart 3 and Chart 4 below.

(12) To know the actual number of appearances, each item was re-counted in the text; the item was counted as the actual number of appearances in each turn. The results are shown in Chart 5 and Chart 6, and in Graph 1 and Graph 2 below.

### 3. RESULTS

As the result of (11) above, the frequency of each item is given as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> At this stage, I focused not only on backchanneling words, but on more words which may play some significant interactional functions, including ‘fillers’ (e.g. あー) or ‘hedge’ (なんか・なにか), which I tentatively call ‘*interactional words*’. Later, I will mainly focus on the words for backchanneling.

**Chart 3. Frequency of Interactional Words: F-D**

	うん	あー ああ	もう	うーん うー	そう	ふーん
F	62	53	28	10	7	1
D	148	1	1	18	20	19

**Chart 4. Frequency of Interactional Words: M-D**

	うん	何か	そう	うーん	ふーん
M	166	48	64	19	0
D	340	82	32	44	65

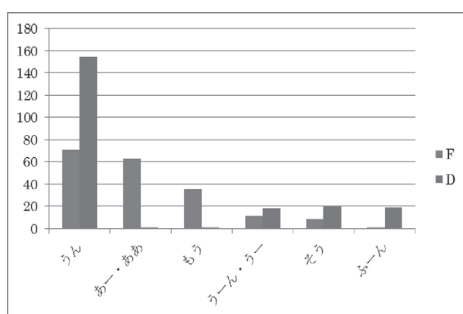
As the result of (12) above, the actual frequency of each item is given below. Underlines indicate that the number is different from the one which was first counted above; each word was used more than twice in one turn. I use this result as the basis of my analysis.

**Chart 5. Actual Frequency of Interactional Words: F-D**

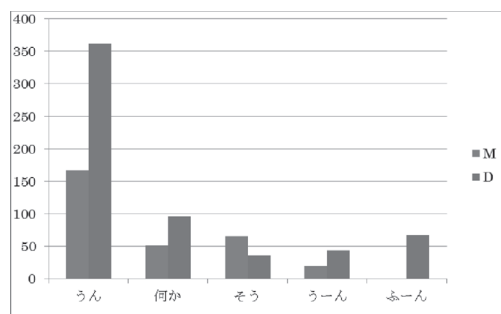
	うん	あー ああ	もう	うーん うー	そう	ふーん
F	71	<u>63</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	1
D	<u>155</u>	1	1	18	20	19

**Chart 6. Actual Frequency of Interactional Words: M-D**

	うん	何か	そう	うーん	ふーん
M	<u>167</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>65</u>	19	0
D	<u>362</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>36</u>	44	<u>67</u>



**Graph 1. Actual Frequency of Interactional Words: F-D**



**Graph 2. Actual Frequency of Interactional Words: M-D**

#### 4. Analysis

To consider the result, I *tentatively* divided these chosen words above into three groups: ‘backchanneling’ (「うん」「そう」「うーん・うー」「ふーん」), ‘filler’ (「あー・ああ」「うーん・うー」) and ‘hedge’ (「何か」「もう」). For my analysis here, I focus on three backchannels: 「うん」 (un) 「そう」 (soo) and 「ふーん」 (huun).<sup>8</sup> There may be some cases in which these words do not play the function of backchanelling. I will discuss them below.

#### 4.1 Backchanneling

'Backchanneling' is usually translated as 「あいづち」 (aizuchi) in Japanese. 'Aizuchi o utsu' (the action) is explained in a Japanese-English dictionary as follows:

相づちを打つ

throw in an appropriate word (now and then) <while the other person is speaking>;  
nod assent <while *sb* is speaking to one>

(『新和英大辞典』 第五版)

The second definition, 'nod assent <while *sb* is speaking to one>', suggests that the aizuchi giver shows some approval or agreement to the other person. On the other hand, the following definition of 'backchannel' which an English-English dictionary gives does not have such an implication:

backchannel

(*linguistics*) a sound or sign that *sb* makes to show that they are listening to the person who is talking to them.

(*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition)

Naito (2002: 8) also points out that the definition of 'aizuchi' itself has not been fixed yet among Japanese researchers. Referring to Mizutani (1988) (1993), Maynard (1993) and Horiguchi (1997), Naito (2002: 8–9) mentions some differences among their definitions. Analyzing my data, I will take a broader sense of the definition; that is, a sound or sign that somebody makes to show that s/he is listening, whether s/he agrees or disagrees with the other person or not.

As backchanneling is an action which may be made while the other person is speaking, it may be overlapped with the other person's utterance or may intervene in it. However, for the use of Text Analytics for Surveys, it is written as another turn in my transcript.

##### 4.1.1 「うん」 (un)

「うん」 (un), which is translated as 'yes' 'yeah' or 'uh-huh' in English, is often used for

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<sup>8</sup> I do not deal with 「うーん・うー」 (uun・uu), as they may be a backchannel and a filler and the difference is vague to me. The frequent use of the hedge 'nanka/nanika' (「何か」) and the filler 'aa' (「あー・ああ」) only in M-D and F-D interaction respectively is also interesting with respect to considering gender characteristics, but I would like to leave them for the future consideration.



backchanneling. As Graph 1 and 2 show above, this is the most frequently used lexical item both in F-D and in M-D interaction. Yet, seeing the actual text, we can see that there are some uses which may not be categorized into backchanneling.

#### 4.1.1.1 「うん」 (un) which is not considered a backchannel

「うん」 (un) may appear in the middle or at the end of a turn. In this case, it may not be directed to the other person's utterance but to his or her own. I will exclude such cases (3 cases in F and 1 in D; 6 in M and 10 in D) from the analysis of the backchanneling. For example:

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367	F:	おまえたちみたいな補充兵に飯を食わすのをもったいないから帰れて、 omaetachi mitai na hojuuhee ni meshi o kuwasu no o mottainai kara kaerette, (They said, 'It's a waste to feed reservists like you, so go home.')
368	D:	そうなの、(笑) soo nano, (laugh) (Did they? (laugh))
369	F:	いやあそのときはうれしかったよ、[心の中で、] うん、 iyaa sono toki wa ureshikatta yo, [kokoro no naka de,] un, (Well, I was so pleased in my heart, <u>yes</u> .)

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#### 4.1.1.2 うん (un) as a genuine response

It is not always easy to differentiate 「うん」 (un) as a backchannel from that as a genuine response. The next example may be regarded as a genuine response rather than a backchannel:

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23	F:	さぶいね、 sabuine (It's cold, isn't it?)
24	D:	<u>うん</u> 、 <u>un</u> ( <u>Yes</u> .)

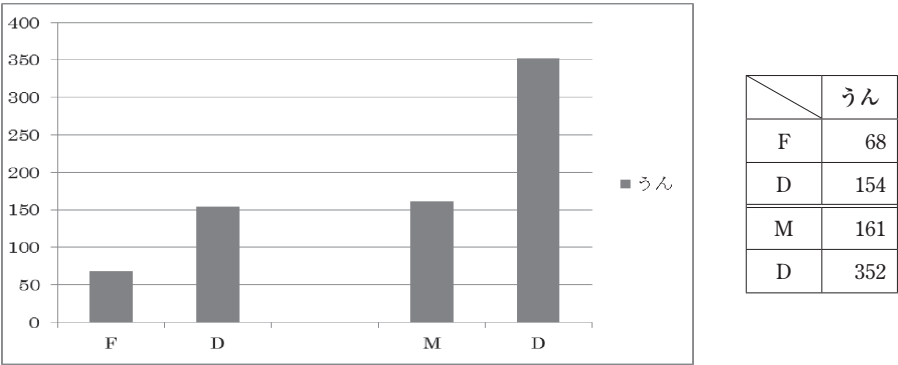
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Yet, the differences may be vague in many cases. As 'genuine' responses and backchannels probably exist along a continuum, I will keep regarding these cases as

backchannels.

4.1.1.3 うん (un) as a backchannel

Excluding the cases I discussed in 4.1.1.1 above, the frequencies of 「うん」 (un) as a backchannel are shown in Graph 3 below:



Graph 3. Frequency of backchanneling: 「うん」 (un)

4.1.1.3.1 Activity role: interviewer-interviewee

Tanaka (2001) points out that participants’ activity roles may create some constraints on their linguistic behavior, and mentions what activity type-specific maxims a good interviewer follows towards the interviewee:

- to help the interviewee talk easily.
- to make the interviewee feel good.
- to avoid displeasing/offending the interviewee.

(Tanaka 2001: 84)

Backchanneling has the function of showing attentiveness to the other person’s talk, and it is effective for the interviewer to help the interviewee talk easily.

The frequent use of backchanneling by D is explained by her activity role. As the interviewer, she needs to show her attentiveness and to facilitate their interaction. As Graph 3 shows, D’s backchannelings are more than twice as many as her interviewee.

4.1.1.3.2 Interpersonal role: mother-daughter/woman-woman

Another interesting point to note is that the frequency of 「うん」 (un) is quite different in

F-D and M-D interaction. As Chart 1 shows, the length of F-D talk is not so different from that of M-D talk: F-D 41 minutes 16 seconds; M-D 43 minutes 17 seconds. Yet, the number of the turns in each talk significantly differs from each other: F-D 556 turns; M-D 1616 turns. Many of the turns in M-D interaction consist of a single 「うん」 (un), and the frequency in M-D interaction is much higher than in F-D.

That is, backchanneling by 「うん」 (un) occurs much more in M-D interaction; in other words, M-D talk is more interactional than F-D talk. In my previous research (Tanaka 2011), one of the results showed that sentence-ending particle ‘ne’ was used in M-D interaction (168 times) much more than in F-D interaction (111 times), and I suggested that one of their interpersonal roles ‘woman-woman’ in M-D interaction may explain the results (ibid.: 147,149). The same explanation may be possible here. Tannen (1990) points out:

I, on the other hand, was approaching the world as many women do: as an individual in a network of connections. In this world, conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus. (Tannen 1990: 25, my underlining)

The confirmation and support may be expressed by 「うん」 (un) in my data.

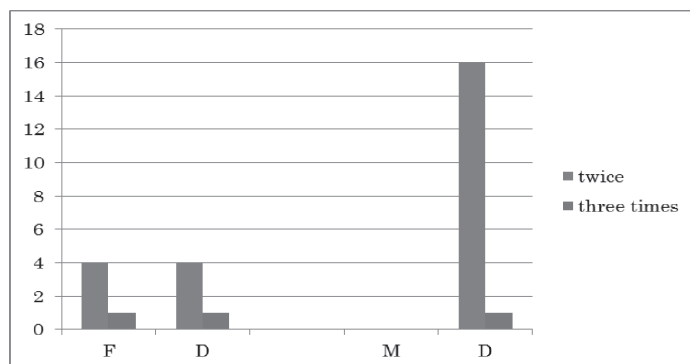
It should be even stressed, when backchannels are cumulated. 「うん」 (un) is sometimes used continuously twice 「うんうん」 (un un) or even three times 「うんうんうん」 (un un un), which are seen both in F-D and M-D interaction. For example:

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- 223 F: 終戦後、これを食べなきゃあ、あー、死んじゃうって言うんで、雑炊食べたり、いも雑炊ちゅく、作ってね、やったけど、いーま、なー？に、飽食時代で、好き勝手に、えー、だから、(3s) 偏食も多いんだよね、  
shuusengo, kore o tabenakyaa, aa, shinjautte iunde, zoosui tabetari, imozoosui chuku, tsukutte ne, yattakedo, iima, naa? ni, hooshoku jidai de, sukikatte de, ee, dakara, (3s) henshoku mo ooindayo ne,  
(After the war, not to starve to death, we ate porridge, made porridge with potatoes, you know. But what is happening now? In the age of plentiful food, they eat as much as they want, so (3s) many people are on an unbalanced diet.)
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224	D:	<u>うん、うん、うん、</u> <u>un, un, un,</u> (yes, yes, yes.)
1116	D:	うんそれで文化祭なんていうと、来たりし [て、] un sorede bunkasai nanteiu to, kitari shi[te] (Yes, and when a school festival is held, for example, they may come.) (……)
1119	M:	私の彼よ [とか彼とか] watashi no kare yo [toka karetoka] (He is my boyfriend, they may introduce.)
1120	D:	[ <u>うん、うんうん、</u> ] で何か、ほら女子大だから普段は全然女子しかいないから [さ、] [un, un un,] de nanka, hora joshidai dakara fudan wa zenzen joshi shika inaikara [sa,] [yes, yes, yes] and um, you know, because it's a women's university, there are usually only girls, [you know,]

This kind of cumulated use may also be related to one of the activity type specific maxims I mentioned above: 'make the interviewee feel good'. That is, the emphasis of the support itself is considered a positive politeness strategy: 'exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)' (Brown & Levinson 1987: 102).

However, looking at the number of cumulated backchannels (See Graph 4 below), we see another difference between F-D and M-D interaction. While the numbers are exactly the same in F-D interaction (F: twice 4, three times 1; D: twice 4, three times 1), they are significantly different in M-D interaction (M: twice 0, three times 0; D: twice 16, three times 1). Although it is not mutual, D seems to have strong empathy with M and to show it by the emphatic backchanneling.



	twice	three times
F	4	1
D	4	1
M	0	0
D	16	1

**Graph 4. Cumulated backchannelings: 「うん」 (un)**

Some examples suggest that D often cumulates 「うん」 (un) when they are talking about some women-related issues: in the example above, they talk about female students at university, and in the example below, M talks about women's situation after the war:

739	M:	女子どもは、 onna kodomo wa, (women and children,)
740	D:	うん、 un (yes)
741	M:	あの一、何て言うの?、こう? anoo, nante iu no?, koo? (Well, what should we say? Um.)
742	D:	襲われたりとか、 osowaretari toka (They may be raped, or something.)
743	M:	あそば、[遊ぶ] 女にされちゃう [って] 言うんで、 asoba, [asobu] onna ni sarechau[tte]iunde, (It was said that they would treat women as their playthings,)
744	D:	[うん、] [うん、] [un,] [un,] (yes, yes)

In the next example, M talks about what she thought about childcare when she was younger.

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1367 M: 何か一子どもが生まれたら、  
nankaa kodomo ga umaretara,  
(Well, when I have children)

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1368 D: うん、  
un  
(yes)

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1369 M: 学校にやるのは東京だと思ったのよ、  
gakkoo ni yaruno wa tookyoo da to omotta noyo,  
(I would like them to go to school in Tokyo, I thought.)

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1370 D: うん、  
un  
(yes)

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1371 M: 自分が東京の学校で楽しい [思い] したから、  
jibun ga tookyoo de gakkoo de tanoshii [omoi] shita kara,  
(Because I had a wonderful time at school in Tokyo.)

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1372 D: [うん、] うん、  
[un,] un,  
(yes, yes.)

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#### 4.1.2 そう (soo)

「そう」 (soo) is translated as ‘so’ ‘yes’ ‘that’s right’ or ‘no’ (when agreeing with the other person’s opinion expressed in a negative sentence) in English. This is much less used than 「うん」 (un), but the frequency is still significant, especially in M-D interaction.

##### 4.1.2.1 そう (soo) which is not considered a backchannel

Yet, not all the uses can be considered backchannels. For example, the following ‘soo’ are clearly a part of other lexical items which are not backchannels. From the list of backchannels, I exclude such uses:

---

106	D:	[ <u>そう</u> ] いう関係が？ [soo] iu kankei ga? ( <u>Such</u> a relationship?)
-----	----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

513	F:	<u>そ</u> ーれも大変だねえ、 soore mo taihen da nee <u>That</u> will be hard, won't it?
-----	----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

1405	M:	今ねえ地方も都会も <u>そう</u> 差がないかもしれないけども、 ima nee chihoo mo tokai mo <u>soo</u> saga nai kamo shirenai kedomo, (Now, there may not be <u>so</u> much difference between the countryside and the city, though.)
------	----	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

#### 4.1.2.2 「そう」 (soo) used with other particles

Referring to the text, I also found that 「そう」 (soo) was often used with other particles. For example:

---

273	F:	うん、(3s) で、やあ子供は言わなきゃわかんねんだもんねえ、 un, (3s) de, yaa kodomo wa iwanakya wakan-nenda mon nee, (Yes, (3s) and children will never learn if we don't teach them, right?)
-----	----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

274	D:	うん、 <u>そう</u> ねえ、 un, <u>soo</u> -nee (Yes, I think <u>so</u> .)
-----	----	------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

Although some cases may be considered genuine responses, rather than backchannels, I keep them in the list of backchannels as it is rather difficult to draw the line.

#### 4.1.2.3 「そう」 (soo) showing agreement or disagreement

「そう」 (soo) can show simple agreement or confirmation as follows:

---

752	D:	でしょ？、畑作ってたんでしょ？ desho?, hatake tsukutte tan-de-shoo? (Wasn't it? You were growing vegetables, weren't you?)
-----	----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

---

753 M: そう、  
soo  
 (Yes.)

---

With a rising intonation, it can also imply disagreement (See Tanaka 2010: 120):

---

51 F: まあ、若い人のいいところもあるけども、あー概して悪いね、  
 maa, wakai hito no ii toko mo aru keredomo, aa gaishite warui ne,  
 (Well, young people have some good points, but generally they are  
 bad.)

---

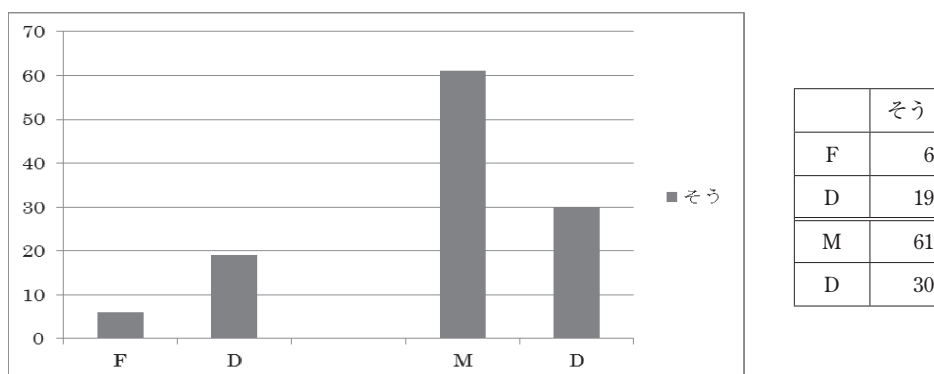
52 D: (笑) そう？  
 (laugh) soo?  
 ((laugh) Are they?)

---

I will regard both cases as backchannelings as they satisfy the broader sense of the definition mentioned in 4.1 above: a sound or sign that somebody makes to show that s/he is listening, whether s/he agrees or disagrees with the other person or not.

#### 4.1.2.4 そう (soo) as a backchannel

Excluding the cases I discussed in 4.1.2.1 above, the frequencies of 「そう」 (soo) as a backchannel are shown in Graph 5 below:



Graph 5. Frequency of backchanneling: 「そう」 (soo)



#### 4.1.2.4.1 Activity role: interviewer-interviewee (which is not clearly seen here)

It is interesting to note that the use of「そう」(soo) is different from that of「うん」(un). In the case of「うん」(un), the more frequent use by D suggests that her activity role, the interviewer, encouraged her to use the backchannel quite often (4.1.1.3.1). However, in the use of「そう」(soo), we cannot see the effect of the activity role here: in M-D interaction, D, the interviewer, uses it much less than M, the interviewee.

Seeing how「そう」(soo) is used in the text, we may understand the reason. 「そう」(soo) can be used in various ways; for example, it may show simple listening ('I see') to the other person, express agreement ('yes' 'that's right'), and with a rising intonation, it can mean 'Is that so?'. We can see in the text that F and M use it in different ways.

F uses「そう」(soo) mainly to show some agreement with what D says or to give affirmation to what D asks. In other words, their activity roles as the interviewer (question asker) and the interviewee (answer giver) are fairly kept in F-D interaction. For example:

---

432 D: 急に来たの？  
kyuu ni kita no?  
(Did they come suddenly?)

---

433 F: [何]  
[nani]  
(What?)

---

434 D: [B29] が、  
bii nijuu ku ga,  
(B29)

---

435 F: うん、[そうだよ、]  
un, [soo-da-yo,]  
(Yes, [that's right].)

---

M also uses「そう」(soo) in the same way. In the next example, M talks about her experience in living in a small shrine during the war, and agrees with D's comment:

---

767 M: そこにみんなで [布団] 敷いて、蚊帳をつつて  
soko ni minna de [futon] shiite, kaya o tsutte  
(we put our [mattress] there, and hung a mosquito net.)

---

---

768 D: [(笑)] びっくりしたよねお参りの人 (笑)、  
[(laugh)] bikkuri shita yo-ne omairi no hito (laugh),  
(laugh) people must have been surprised when they came to pray  
there. (laugh))

---

769 M: (笑) そう、  
(laugh) soo,  
((laugh) right.)

---

However, this is not the only way that M uses 「そう」 (soo). With rising intonation, she uses it to react to D with a small surprise and a question tone. In the following example, D says what she heard from F (when he was a university student, there were only two female students in class), and M reacts to it:

---

226 D: 何かお父さんも何か言ってたよね、何か (0.5s) 2人ぐらいいたとか何とか、  
nanka otoosan mo nanka itteta yo-ne, nanka (0.5) hutari gurai ita toka  
nantoka,  
(Father told us once, something like, there were only about two females  
then, didn't he?)

---

227 M: あそう?、(笑)  
a soo?, (laugh)  
(Oh, did he? (laugh))

---

228 D: (笑) 口きいたこともなかったとか、  
(laugh) kuchi kiita koto mo nakatta toka,  
((laugh) He told me he had never talked with them.)

---

229 M: あっそう?  
a soo?  
(Oh, hadn't he?)

---

Though her main activity role is the interviewee (an answer giver), M sometimes asks questions to D. As the following example shows, their activity roles are not very fixed, and they often simply chat with each other. This may be a reason why M uses more 「そう」 (soo) than D and the uses differ from F-D to M-D interactions:

---

89	M:	年齢制限はないの？、 nenree seegen wa nai no?, (Is there no age limit? [retirement system])
----	----	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

90	D:	今のところは、70、 ima no tokoro wa, nanajuu, (In the university I am working for now, the limit is 70.)
----	----	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

91	M:	あっ、 <u>そう</u> 、 a, <u>soo</u> , (Oh, I <u>see</u> .)
----	----	------------------------------------------------------------

---

#### 4.1.2.4.2 Interpersonal role: mother-daughter/woman-woman

On the other hand, the effects of interpersonal roles in M-D and F-D are seen in the use of 「そう」 (soo). As discussed with regard to 「うん」 (un) in 4.1.1.3.2, more frequent use of 「そう」 (soo) in M-D than in F-D interaction may suggest the difference of their interpersonal roles. Sharing the same gender, the distance of M and D seems to be closer than that of F and D. Such interpersonal relationship may make M-D talk more interactive and facilitate frequent use of backchanneling.

The cumulative use of 「そう」 (soo) is seen only in M-D interactions. This may suggest the closeness their interpersonal roles create. In the following examples, M refers to a person they both know and D confirms the sharing:

---

92	D:	うん (1s) 前のとこは (0.5s) あんまりこう、決まってないみたい、 un (1s) mae no tooko wa (0.5s) anmari koo, kimatte nai mitai, (Yeah (1s) the university I was working for before (0.5s) doesn't have a clear age limit [for retirement].)
----	----	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

93	M:	うん、あだから何かねえ、あの先生なん un, a dakara nanka nee, ano sensei nan (Um, that may be why that teacher...)
----	----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

94	D:	あ、 <u>そうそうそう</u> 、 a, <u>soo soo soo</u> , (Yes yes yes, that's why.)
----	----	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------

---

- 
- 287 M: うん、広島の方の人、  
un, hiroshima no hoo no hito,  
(Yeah, the person who came from Hiroshima.)
- 
- 288 D: そうそうそう、あの人たち夫婦で今オーストラリアに住んでんの、  
soo soo soo, ano hito tachi huuhu de ima oosutoraria ni sunden-no,  
(Yes, yes yes. The couple lives in Australia now.)
- 

#### 4.1.3 ふーん (huun)

「ふーん」(huun) is translated as ‘I see’ ‘Is that so?’ or ‘Oh, really?’. It could imply some light admiration or slight scorn, depending on the intonation.

Referring to the text, we see some uses which may not be categorized into backchanneling. I first exclude them from the list.

##### 4.1.3.1 ふーん (huun) which is not considered a backchannel

F uses 「ふーん」(huun) once, but it is used as a quotation of someone’s saying as follows. I will exclude this from backchanneling:

- 
- 259 F: (2s) だから、まあ、こんなもんだと思ってるからしょうがないけれども、  
いくら親が、お父さんたちがこうだったった、ふーんってしか、  
(2s) dakara, maa, konna mondato omotteru kara shooganai keredomo,  
ikura oyaga, otoosan-tachi ga koodattatta, huun-tte shika,  
((2s) I accept the things are something like this and I couldn’t help it,  
but even if parents tell them we were like that, they [young people]  
just say ‘Oh, really?’)
- 

「ふーん」(huun) appears not also at the beginning of a turn, but also in the middle or at the end of it. In the latter case, it may be used to ‘ruminate’ on what s/he heard, rather than to backchannel. I will exclude such cases from the list:

- 
- 372 D: 場所は、東京のどこに？  
basho wa, tookyoo no doko ni?  
(Where in Tokyo were you then?)
-

- 
- 373 F: 六本木、  
roppongi  
(Roppongi.)
- 
- 374 D: 六本？ 木にい [たの?] ふーん、  
roppon? gi ni i[tano?] huun,  
(You were in Roppongi, I see.)
- 

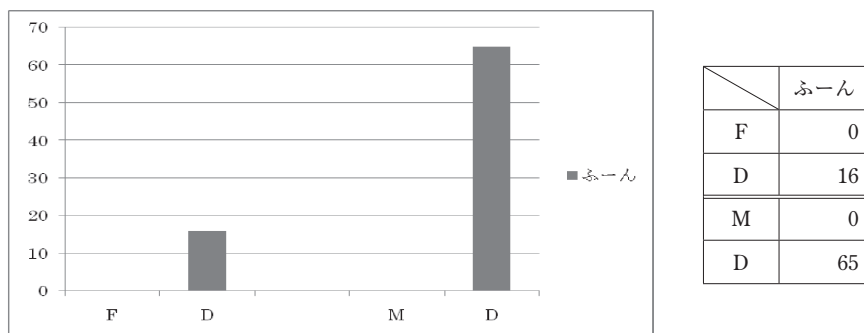
#### 4.1.3.2 ふーん (huun) with other backchannel(s)

「ふーん」(huun) sometimes appears with other backchannel(s). As they play the function of backchanneling together, I will keep such cases in the list:

- 
- 1269 M: あの、キミ子姉さんが生きてたころいうと、盆暮れちゃんとな、いろん  
な [物] 送ってきたわよとかって言ってたけどね、  
ano kimiko-neesan ga ikiteta koro iuto, bonkure chanto ne, ironna  
[mono] okutte kita wayo tokatte itteta kedo ne,  
(Well, when my sister Kimiko was alive, she told me he used to send  
presents for seasonal greetings.)
- 
- 1270 D: [あっそうなの、] ふーん、どうしてるんだろねえ、  
[a soona no,] huun, doo shiterundaroo nee,  
(Oh, did she? I see. I wonder how he is now.)
- 

#### 4.1.3.3 ふーん (huun) as a backchannel

Excluding the cases I discussed in 4.1.3.1 above, the frequencies of「ふーん」(huun) as a backchannel are shown in Graph 6 below:



Graph 6. Frequency of backchanneling: 「ふーん」(huun)

#### 4.1.3.3.1 Societal role: elderly Man/Woman vs. middle-aged Woman

It is interesting to note that neither F nor M uses 「ふーん」 (huun). In contrast, D rather frequently uses it. This may come from their generation difference: F and M are categorized into 'elderly' while D is 'middle-aged'. As 「ふーん」 (huun) has a light and casual tone, it may be more frequently used by the younger generation. Of course, it is dangerous to generalize these cases, and we need further research on this matter.

#### 4.1.3.3.2 Activity role: interviewer-interviewee

Her activity role may also explain the results that only D uses 「ふーん」 (huun). As D is the interviewer, she needs to react to what the interviewee says. As a result, D uses more 「ふーん」 (huun) as a backchannel. D uses 「ふーん」 (huun) to express her interest in what the other person says and facilitates their interaction. For example:

---

447 F: だって、B29がうわーあーあーと低空で来るから、乗ってる、のを見える  
んだもん、  
datte, B29 ga uwaa aa aa to teekuu de kuru kara, notteru, no o mieru-n-  
da mon,  
(As B29 bombers were flying low, we were able to see the pilot, you  
know.)

---

448 D: うん、  
un  
(I see.)

---

449 F: だから、あんなのにバラバラってやられたらもう一巻の終わり、  
dakara, annano ni barararatte yararetara moo ikkan no owari,  
(So if you are shot from them, it's the end of you.)

---

450 D: ふーん、あの東大のこっち側がみんな焼けたの？  
huun, ano toodai no kocchi gawa ga minna yaketa no?  
(I see. Was this side of Tokyo University all burnt?)

---

---

1377 M: 東京っていいなーと思ったわ、  
tookyoo-tte iinaa to omotta wa,  
(I thought Tokyo was good.)

---

---

1378	D:	ふーん、何が、いい？、 huun, nani ga, iii?, (I see. What is good?)
1379	M:	とにかく学校に通うのがいいじゃない？、近くて、 tonikaku gakkooo ni kayou no ga ii jyanai?, chikakute, (Anyway, it is convenient to go to school, isn't it? Very close, you know.)

---

#### 4.1.3.3.3 Interpersonal role: father-daughter vs. mother-daughter

It should also be noted that D uses 「ふーん」 (huun) in talking to M more than 4 times than to F: 65 times to M; 16 times to F. This may be explained by the difference of their interpersonal roles: father-daughter vs. mother-daughter.

Holmes (1995) points out the differences of children's way of talking to their mother and father in middle-class American families:

(...) a study of directives in middle-class American families found that children used less polite imperatives to their mothers, and more mitigated directives to fathers. (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1984). The researchers suggest that these studies reflect the fact that mothers are perceived as less powerful than fathers, and as less deserving of respect or negative politeness. (Though it is worth noting that unmitigated directives are normal between intimates. The children may feel closer to their mothers.)

(Holmes 1995: 159, my underlining)

Although we are not sure that the same phenomena can be seen in Japanese, I actually felt more distance or respect toward my late father. In other words, I feel more closeness or friendliness toward my mother, though I also loved my father. The different relation may cause the different frequency of this casual backchannel. (Similar phenomena can be seen in the use of sentence-ending particles: See Tanaka 2011: 157).

Dictionaries explain when 「ふーん」 (huun) is used. For example:

ふうん (huun) [感] (an interjection)

軽く同意・了承するとき、また、ちょっと感心したときなどに発する語。

(It is used when you express an agreement or approval lightly, and when you are

impressed a little.)

『明鏡国語辞典』

- ① 感心したり考え込んだりした時にいう語。

(It is used when you are impressed or absorbed in thinking.)

- ② 相手の話を、軽くあしらう時にいう語。

(It is used when you treat what the other person says lightly.)

『精選版 日本国語大辞典』

(My English translation and underlining)

As the underlined parts suggest, 「ふーん」 (huun) has a nuance of 'lightness' and it may sound less respectful to the other person. Considering the distance and respect D feels toward F, it is understandable she is relatively reluctant to use this backchannel to F.

On the other hand, the closeness and friendliness D feels toward M allow her to use it without reluctance. The cumulative use, which is seen only from D (1022, 1442) to M, may express the closeness even further. In the example below, M talks about her friend's wedding which was held shortly after the war, and D actively listens to it:

---

1019 M: うん、何かささやかな結婚式だったけど、  
un, nanka sasayaka na kekkon-shiki datta kedo,  
(Well, although it was a rather simple wedding,)

---

1020 D: うん、  
un,  
(I see.)

---

1021 M: 上野の精養軒か何かで一部屋小さ [な、部屋借り] てやったのよね、  
ueno no seeyooken ka nanika de hitoheya chiisa [na, heyakari] te yatta  
no-yo-ne,  
(They rented a small room in Seeyooken or somewhere in Ueno, and  
had a wedding there, you know.)

---

1022 D: [ふーん、] ふーん、あすこの、うちのそばの、  
[huun,] huun, asuko no, uchi no sobano,  
(Oh, I see. I see. That is close to my place.)

---



## 5. CONCLUSION

We have seen how participants' roles may affect their backchanneling behavior in the interaction. Chart 7 below shows what is discussed in which section.

**Chart 7. Backchannels and Roles of Participants**

Roles backchannel	SOCIETAL ROLE	INTERPERSONAL ROLE	ACTIVITY ROLE
「うん」 (un)		mother-daughter/ woman-woman (4.1.1.3.2)	interviewer- interviewee (4.1.1.3.1)
「そう」 (soo)		mother-daughter/ woman-woman (4.1.2.4.2)	interviewer- interviewee (not clearly seen) (4.1.2.4.1)
「ふーん」 (huun)	elderly vs. middle-aged (4.1.3.3.1)	father-daughter vs. mother- daughter (4.1.3.3.3)	interviewer- interviewee (4.1.3.3.2)

Our examination revealed the different roles of the participants and the effect on their backchanneling behavior. Although I was aware of the difference of my relation to my father and my mother, I did not notice how it affected our linguistic behavior and the results were an interesting discovery for me.

Another purpose of this research was, as mentioned above, to use Text Analytics for Surveys and explore some possible use of this software for conversation or discourse analysis. In the actual use for this purpose, I have found some advantages and disadvantages as follows:

Advantages:

1. Text Analytics for Surveys is effective to gain a general picture of highly frequent words in a text. It saves much time, which would be required if we counted manually. Getting the general picture gives us possible focal points for analysis.
2. The software also shows us how many times each extracted word is used by which participant. This is often useful as a reference in the process of detailed analysis.

Disadvantages:

1. We may not use the transcription conventions which are usually used for text analysis. For

example, 'backchannels' are often imbedded in other person's turns in a transcript, but it should be written as an independent turn.

2. As the software may not always recognize the linguistic items properly, it is essential for us to refer to the actual text and to re-consider the results in the context. This should not be regarded as a major disadvantage of this software and it is probably true in any other research. We should be ready to spend enough time for re-consideration.
3. As the software may pick up some linguistic items improperly (See 2.3.1 (10)), it may also omit some items which we would like to pick up. Since I used the items the software processed as the basis of this research, there might be some omissions.

I used Text Analytics for Surveys for my text analysis. This was my first trial for this purpose and an interesting experience for me. I hope other researchers who are interested in this field will also explore better use of this instrument.

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

F, M, D = speaker identification

、 = parcelling of talk; breathing time

? = rising tone

— = prolonged sound

[ = start of overlapping speech

] = end of overlapping speech

(\*) = the speaker's contribution is indistinct

(laugh) = non-verbal contribution

(s) = approximate seconds of the pause

[ ] = my explanation

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